Action Officer Keys to Success

presentation to the

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Overview

- Lehmann's lecture rules
- Special Projects Directorate (SPD) overview
- From the Mouths of Action Officers
- Tie-in to professional communications
- Service vs. joint staffs
- Observations on potential action officer pitfalls & force multipliers
- Summary

Lehmann's Lecture Rules

- Lecture starts where article left off
- Slides are guides; I talk to them, but do not read them
- Questions, comments, interaction welcome (encouraged) at any time

SPD Mission

- Immediate special staff element for CMC
- Provides direct support to CMC, ACMC, SMMC
- CMC lead agent for:
  - -counterpart visits
  - -national & international top-level schools visits
  - -official GO/SES events
  - -CMC-hosted symposiums, off-sites, & events
- Supports active & retired GO

SPD Major Events (~14/year)

- CMC counterpart visits (quarterly)
  - Separate, concurrent Principal & Spouse programs
- General Officer Symposium (annually)
  - Separate, concurrent Principal & Spouse programs
- Executive Off-Sites (quarterly)
  - Separate, concurrent Principal & Spouse & SgtsMaj programs
- BGen Select Orientation Course (annually)
  - Separate, concurrent Principal & Spouse programs
- SMMC Symposium (annually)
  - Separate, concurrent Principal & Spouse programs
- NATO Defense College visit (semi-annually)

O Projects/Special Events (~18/y

- Active duty GO Directory (annually)
- Retired GO Directory (annually)
- Sergeants Major Directory (annually)
- GO Newsletter (3/year)
- GO/SES website (daily)
- Retired GO Operations Update (2-3/year)
- Top Level Schools briefings (4) (annually)
- CMC Parades guest-of-honor (GOH) escorts (2-3/year)
- HQMC birthday ball GOH escorts (annually)
- Evening & sunset parades' schedules & GOHs coordination (annually)
- USMC birthday cakes to former CMCs (annually)

Action Officer Humor

- "If we wait until the last minute to do it, it'll only take a minute." MAJ (EUCOM)

- "The only reason that anything ever gets done is because there are pockets of competence in every command. The key is to find them...and then exploit the hell out of 'em."
CDR (CENTCOM)

- "We are condemned men who are chained and will row in place until we rot."
LtCol (CENTCOM) on life at his command

- "I can describe what it feels like being a Staff Officer in two words: distilled pain."
CDR (NAVEUR)

- "Let me tell you about the benefits of being on a staff...This should be a short conversation." LtCol to Lt Col (EUCOM)

More Action Officer Humor

- "One of the secrets to maintaining my positive attitude in this job is this: I complete no tasker before its time…" MAJ (EUCOM)

- "When you get right up to the line that you're not supposed to cross, the only person in front of you will be me!"
CDR (CENTCOM) on his view of the value of being politically correct in today's military

- "There's nothing wrong with crossing that line a little bit, it's jumping over it buck naked that will probably get you in trouble..."
LtCol (EUCOM) responding to the above

- "I've become the master of nodding my head and acting like I give a sh!t, and then instantly forgetting what the hell a person was saying the moment they walk away."
Flag-level Executive Assistant

Still More Action Officer Humor

- "I may be slow, but I do poor work."
MAJ (USAREUR)

- "It's not a lot of work unless you have to do it." LTC (EUCOM)

- "Cynicism is the smoke that rises from the ashes of burned out dreams."
Maj (CENTCOM) on the daily thrashings delivered to AOs at his Command

- "The chance of success in these talks is the same as the number of "R's" in "fat chance..."""
GS-15 (SHAPE)

- "His knowledge on that topic is only PowerPoint deep..." MAJ (JS)

- "Is that a Navy or a Marine admiral?"
- MAJ (EUCOM)

The Last of Action Officer Humo

- "The 'L' in CENTCOM stands for leadership... At this Command, we have written in large, black letters: DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) on the back of our security badges."
  Maj (CENTCOM)

- "I've heard of 'buzzwords' before but I have never experienced a 'buzz sentence' or a 'buzz paragraph' until today."
  Maj (EUCOM) after listening to a JFCOM briefer

- "This is all happening because we had the sympathetic detonation of a stress grenade."
  Maj (EUCOM) after an insignificant issue became a theater focus because somebody used the "Reply all" function

- "'Leaning forward' is really just the first phase of 'falling on your face.'"
  Col (MARFOREUR)

Professional Communications

- Speaking: effectively carry “the message”
- Writing: often precedes you; initial impressions
- E-mail/voice-mail/video-teleconference
- References: ask, observe workstations (great package given at C&SC)
- Practice: e-mails, briefings,

Service vs. Joint Staffs

- Differences, sure; but largely the same
  - Main difference #1: perceptions
  - Main difference #2: environment comfort level
- Every staff has its own focused perspectives
- Every staff is ‘people-intensive’

Observations I

- **The 3 most important questions that action officers must constantly ask themselves:**
  - **"What do I know?"**
  - **"Who else needs to know what I know?"**
  - **"Have I told them?"**

- **The 4th most important question that action officers must constantly ask themselves:**

Observations II

- "BLUF Principle"
  - Not used enough
  - Think about your own listening skills
- E-mail
  - **Be careful**: potential world-wide distribution (even to those you deliberately did not include)
  - **Be aggressive**: great tool to build situational awareness & quickly get feedback/discussion
  - **Be disciplined**: practice your writing; think about what you are

Observations III

- Personal opinions vs. command positions
- Relationships: trust, credibility
- Communicate <u>to</u> your target audience, not <u>from</u> your own perspectives
- "Staff commanders" from Millennium Challenge 02 (MC 02): collaborative information environment (CIE)

Summary

- Great thrill to hopefully contribute to your future effectiveness
- Tools, options, things to consider; not solutions until you apply the right tools in the right ways, at the right times, in the right places
- Commanders rely on action officers
- Tomorrow's challenges &

Questions

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